Brand Logo Frames: How and When Framing Brand Logos Increases Purchase Likelihood

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[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1017623/volumes/v42/NA-42

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Research has demonstrated that design features such as the shape (Grohmann 2008; Hagtvedt 2011; Zhang, Feick, and Price 2006) and color (Labrecque and Milne 2011) of a logo influence brand perceptions. One design feature that has received little attention is the use of frames. Yet, a significant number of brands feature a frame surrounding their logo (e.g., Smucker’s, Leap Frog). In fact, as of December 2013, 8.84% of American corporations listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and classified as members of the consumer goods or service industries used a framed brand logo. Given their pervasiveness within the marketplace it is important to examine the effects of logo frames on consumer behavior. In this research we argue that logo frames can trigger either associations of protection or confinement.

A logo frame is a graphic representation of a psychological boundary. Much of the work on boundaries has examined how they can serve as organizational tools. Indeed, boundaries have been shown to provide a meaningful sense of where things belong (Burris and Branscombe 2005; Cutright 2012). When environments are perceived as disorganized and chaotic boundaries can be used to mitigate the experience of emotional discomfort (Belk, Seo, and Li 2007; Ger and Yenicioglu 2004). Physical boundaries, however, have also been shown to generate feelings of confinement. In general, small and contained spaces may make people feel confined and restricted (Hall 1996) and this, in turn, influences the way in which stimuli are processed (Meyers-Levy and Zhu 2007) and the consumption choices people make (Levav and Zhu 2009).

Little research has examined how logo frames themselves influence consumer perceptions. In this paper, we hypothesize that a logo frame symbolizes a physical boundary such as a wall or fence. Physical boundaries simultaneously protect people inside of them, while isolating them from the outside world. We propose that a logo frame, like a physical boundary, may symbolize either protection or confinement and whether a logo frame is associated with protection or confinement will depend on perceptions of purchase risk. Safety is a fundamental need (Maslow 1943). When faced with high risk it is likely that a consumer’s desire for risk mitigation (e.g., Cox and Rich 1964) makes the concept of protection relatively accessible. If purchase risk is low consumers do not need to concern themselves with risk reduction. Consequently, we hypothesize that when purchase risks are high (low) a frame’s symbolic association with protection (confinement) will become relatively salient and increase (decrease) purchase intent.

In study 1 participants were presented an advertisement for a scented candle. The advertisement featured the brand’s logo. We manipulated the presence or absence of a logo frame. In the frame-absent condition a square frame was placed around the logo. In the frame-present condition there was no frame. We also manipulated perceptions of risk. In the high-risk condition participants were told that the product was a final sale. In the low-risk condition participants were informed that the product carried a satisfaction guarantee and that consumers would receive a full refund if they were unsatisfied with their purchase. As predicted, in the high-risk conditions, participants were more willing to purchase the scented candle if the brand logo was framed ($F(1, 127) = 4.78, p < .05$); in the low-risk conditions, however, participants were less willing to purchase the scented candle if the brand logo was framed ($F(1, 127) = 8.05, p < .01$).

Study 2 examined the effect of frame type. According to our theorization only certain logo frames will influence purchase intent, those that can signal protection and/or confinement. Incomplete logos do not signal either protection or confinement and therefore a logo featuring an incomplete frame should not influence purchase likelihood. Participants were shown an advertisement for a sports car. The advertisement featured the brand’s logo. We manipulated the type of frame surrounding this logo. In the frame-absent condition the logo was not framed. In the regular-frame condition a square frame surrounded the logo (similar to the frame-present condition of study 1). In the incomplete-frame condition a square frame with dashed lines surrounded the logo. We also manipulated perceptions of risk. Participants were informed that these automobiles had been sold overseas for 25-years. In the high-risk condition, participants were told that two safety recalls had been issued. In the low-risk condition, participants were told that no safety recalls had ever been issued. As predicted, under high-risk conditions, participants were more willing to purchase the car if the brand logo featured a regular frame than if it was not framed ($F(1, 203) = 4.83, p < .05$). There was no difference in terms of purchase intent between the frame-absent and incomplete-frame conditions ($F(1, 203) = 1.00$, NS). Under low-risk conditions, participants were less willing to purchase the car if the brand logo featured a regular frame than if it was not framed ($F(1, 203) = 3.48, p = .05$). There was no difference in terms of purchase intent between the frame-absent and incomplete-frame conditions ($F < 1$). According to these results, a necessary condition for the interactive effect of purchase risk and logo framing on purchase intent is that the logo frame signal protection/confinement. In Study 3 we extended these findings by showing that the positive effect of brand logo frame on purchase intent under high risk is mediated by a reduction in perceived risk, whereas the negative effect of brand logo frame on purchase intent under low risk is mediated by an increase in perceptions of confinement.

We show that logo frames may either trigger an association of protection or an association of confinement. Furthermore, we demonstrate that which of these associations is relatively more accessible depends on purchase risk. High (low) purchase risk increases the accessibility of a logo frame’s association with protection (confinement). This is the first research to systematically examine the influence of purchase risk on logo frame perceptions. Furthermore, it is the first research to demonstrate that logo frames can impact consumption intentions and the first to highlight how logo frames can negatively impact brand perceptions.

REFERENCES


